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OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES OF
THE UNITED NATIONS FOR
INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
COOPERATION

Field representation of United Nations system organizations: a more unitary approach

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council the comments of the Administrative Committee on Coordination on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "Field representation of United Nations system organizations: a more unitary approach" (A/49/133-E/1994/49).

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* A/49/50/Rev.1.

** E/1994/100.

COMMENTS OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE COMMITTEE ON COORDINATION

I. GENERAL COMMENTS

1. The report deals with an important subject that has been kept under continuous review within the United Nations system, its member organizations and their governing bodies. Some of the points covered by the report are dealt with in the Secretary-General's report to the General Assembly on the unified presence of the United Nations at the country level (A/48/146/Add.1) and were raised in the statement of 9 November 1993 made on behalf of the Secretary-General to the Second Committee (A/48/585).

2. In the view of the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC), the report has made an interesting contribution to the debate in the United Nations system on this matter and related issues. However, the value of the analysis and recommendations of the report is diminished by some of the assumptions and judgements which are not substantiated and cannot be fully supported. A more balanced presentation, giving a more complete overview of all ramifications of the proposals presented in the report, would have improved its usefulness.

3. A number of ACC members believed that the field representation of the United Nations organizations and the decentralization of the programming process should be undertaken according to specific mandates and areas of technical expertise of each organization. They stressed that the establishment of field offices fell within the policies set by respective governing bodies of the organizations as well as specific agreements with the host countries concerned.

4. ACC members noted that the Inspector related the functions of field offices only to operational activities, ignoring the mandated technical functions of specialized agencies. In the view of some organizations, the assessment of the development of a field representation network made by the Inspector does not have universal validity. For example, a decentralization policy was established by the Governing Body of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in 1976 and has been kept under continual review since then to ensure effective access of member States to the services of the Organization. The International Labour Organization (ILO) has recently taken major policy decisions to get closer to its constituents at the country level, while emphasizing that reinforcing the agency's presence in the regions should not be confused with decentralization of its policy orientations. In discussing this new policy, the ILO Governing Body stressed that major policy orientations and decisions of ILO were vested in the Governing Body and in the International Labour Conference and that there should be no question of decentralizing that authority.

5. Some ACC members stressed that the report has not taken fully into account present arrangements between specialized agencies and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). For example, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) is the only specialized agency of the United Nations system whose field representatives (UNIDO country directors) are completely integrated within the UNDP field offices through the memorandum of understanding concluded between them in April 1989. According to this

agreement, the UNDP resident representative is simultaneously the UNIDO representative and the UNIDO country director functions as the deputy to the resident representative.

6. The report focuses on the issue of the unification of field activities, recognizing that it is unlikely to achieve unity at the country level as long as there is separation at the headquarters level. The discussion that led to the adoption of General Assembly resolution 47/199, was a significant step in addressing this issue. Since implementation of 47/199 entails an integrated approach on several fronts, including programming cycles, budget, common premises and training, ACC members feel that proposals for further reform should be carried out within the framework of guidelines laid down by the General Assembly and progress in their implementation. They should also be reviewed in the context of General Assembly resolution 48/209 on operational activities for development: field offices of the United Nations development system, and of General Assembly resolution 48/162, which embodies the outcome of discussions on the restructuring and revitalization of the United Nations in economic, social and related fields.

7. ACC members concur with the report's conclusion that with general recognition of the urgent need to improve further the timeliness and quality of the United Nations contribution to development, humanitarian assistance and security, it would be essential to reduce bureaucratic layers and to build carefully on the comparative advantages of each of the parts of the system, while improving links among the various parts. The ongoing reforms and restructuring should aim at greater programmatic coherence and system-wide coordination, as appropriate. To this end, ACC members are building on existing structures and are modifying them to be more effective and enhance complementarities among programmes, while maintaining their identities and comparative advantages, thus improving the system's capacity to deliver relevant assistance in a timely and efficient manner to the recipient countries. ACC therefore considers it prudent to avoid adopting new structures that are not clearly superior to existing ones and that do not command the full confidence of all parties concerned.

8. ACC members noted that a number of basic issues have not been addressed by the report: different mandates, constituencies, governing body decisions, resources, programme and budget cycles, etc. No reference has been made in the report to the Joint Consultative Group on Policy (JCGP) as an example of how the main funding agencies of the United Nations are trying to coordinate their policies and programmes. While the need to bring together political, humanitarian and economic concerns has been stressed, there is no reference to establishing linkages between emergency and development assistance and to the need for greater attention to disaster prevention, preparedness, mitigation and rehabilitation.

9. ACC strongly believes that in the main, and excepting a handful of spectacular emergency cases or where special mandates have been established, the primary role of the resident coordinator as a development professional remains essential.

II. COMMENTS ON RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1: Option A, as described in paragraphs 28 to 33 [of the JIU report], should be considered by the Secretary-General for immediate implementation. A letter should be sent by the Secretary-General to all resident coordinators outlining their "early warning responsibilities" and reaffirming their role as the Department of Humanitarian Affairs/Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Coordinator representatives.

Recommendation 2: Selection of resident coordinators: The Secretary-General should take immediate steps to modify, after concurrence of ACC, the procedures for selection and appointment of the resident coordinators. This should become the responsibility of a committee to be chaired by the Secretary-General or his representative and composed of the Administrator of UNDP, the Under-Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development, the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, one of the Under-Secretaries-General for Political Affairs and the Under-Secretary-General for Administration and Management. The individual selected by the Committee would continue to be cleared with the heads of the concerned agencies and, of course, the Government of the country of assignment.

10. Some ACC members pointed out that the weaving of responsibility for political, humanitarian and human rights issues into development ones might give the impression to some developing countries that such arrangements bring conditionality to bear on the development dialogue. They believe that this aspect of the recommendations should be addressed through a dialogue between the Resident Coordinator's office and the specialized agencies. The suggested widening of the resident coordinator's humanitarian assistance responsibilities is already being implemented. A number of ACC members noted that clarification should be provided on the role of resident coordinators in an early warning system, as it is not clear how ongoing early warning activities and new early warning activities would be integrated and coordinated, including those at the global level.

11. ACC members strongly support a strengthened resident coordinator function. The provisions of General Assembly resolution 47/199 and Economic and Social Council resolution 93/7 on the strengthening of the resident coordinator system, including provisions on the widening of the pool for the selection of the resident representative/resident coordinator and greater transparency in the selection process, are now in the course of being implemented, in accordance with the agreement reached by JCGP on 7 February 1994 at its high-level meeting in Dhaka. The appointment of the resident coordinator continues to be the responsibility of the Secretary-General after consultations with members of ACC. The appointment of the UNDP resident representative remains the responsibility of the Administrator of UNDP.

Recommendation 3: The Secretary-General should study the proposal for more structured early warning/political functions in the context of a unitary United Nations office (option B) described in paragraphs 34 and 35 [of the JIU report] and report to ACC and the General Assembly on the feasibility and possible timetable for its implementation.

12. This recommendation reiterates several objectives contained in resolution 47/199 regarding the strengthening of the resident coordinator functions. Here, however, the resident coordinator's role with respect to political affairs, mediation and early warning in regard to conflicts is accentuated. Although the Inspector notes that "survival" has often taken precedence over "development", and that skills required for peacemaking, democratization and humanitarian assistance are different from those of the current resident coordinator functions, many ACC members remain of the view that this changed profile may be the exception rather than the rule. In the view of ACC, the major focus in the resident coordinator's job description should remain on development, particularly since early warning activities of the United Nations system are being addressed by the Department of Humanitarian Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat. It notes the present arrangements between the Department of Humanitarian Affairs and UNDP.

Recommendation 4: Option C [paras. 38-49 of the JIU report] is submitted for further consideration by the executive heads of United Nations system organizations in the context of ACC and by concerned governing bodies. Should such discussion be encouraging, the Secretary-General is requested to prepare a more detailed proposal for its implementation, taking into account the views of the concerned governing bodies of the specialized agencies. This task could be entrusted to an ad hoc time-limited ACC working group.

13. ACC considers that this recommendation espouses an even more assertive "policy profile" for a "United Nations representative" endowed with the "power of the purse" in the United Nations development system that would deeply modify current arrangements involving resources distributions and governance. These questions are in the domaine of the General Assembly, which has expressed its position most recently in resolutions 47/199 and 48/209.